

Working for OUR community

John Fonfara

PROPERTY TAX INCREASES DELAYED

With Hartford homeowners facing an unacceptable 78% increase in property taxes, a significant part of my efforts this past session was spent on getting support for Mayor Eddie Perez's Homestead Initiative. Despite growing support from a number of cities and towns throughout Connecticut, we were unable to pass the Homestead plan this year. We were able to pass a three-year delay in the implementation of the effects of revaluation. This will allow towns, including Hartford, to put off shifting property tax increases on to already overburdened homeowners. I will continue my efforts to reduce the property tax burden in Hartford and Wethersfield through the Homestead Initiative and through broad-based property tax reform.



Left to right: Mayor Eddie Perez, Senate Majority Leader Martin Looney, Senate President Kevin Sullivan, and myself at a March press conference in support of the Homestead Property Tax Initiative.

SMART GROWTH EFFORTS CONTINUE

The legislature's Planning and Development Committee, which I chair, has been leading the effort to make Connecticut more conscious of the effects of poorly planned growth and development throughout our state. Connecticut is developing much faster than our population is growing. People and businesses are moving further out and away from our cities (Hartford) and inner suburban towns (Wethersfield). This development is forever changing the character of our beautiful state and increasing the economic disparity of the Hartford region. This means more wealth moves out and puts further strains on towns like Hartford and Wethersfield. Although we were not successful in passing legislation this year that will help towns plan better, for the future of Wethersfield and Hartford I will continue to make this issue a high priority.

CLEANING UP OUR NEIGHBORHOODS

For the second year, I authored legislation to enable towns to tax take-out eating establishments to fund anti-litter programs. Many residents who live near or on a road with a fast food restaurant know all too well that their street or property becomes the exit point for trash thrown out of car windows. Unfortunately, sufficient support has not yet developed around this issue. I am working to change that thinking. I will continue to work for passage of this legislation.

SUMMER 2004

Dear Friend:

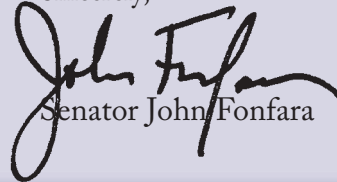
Recently the Connecticut General Assembly completed its 2004 legislative session. I am pleased to report that we were able to pass important legislation to keep Connecticut a great place to live and work.

We brought property tax relief to our overburdened taxpayers by restoring the property tax credit on your state income tax to \$500, and by allowing Hartford and other cities and towns to delay the implementation of the recent property revaluation by up to three years. Reducing our reliance on property taxes as a primary source of municipal revenue is still a challenge we need to meet, but these two initiatives will protect taxpayers and allow us to pursue real property tax reform in the next legislative session.

We also began the crucial task of repairing the safety net for the state's poorest of the poor, eliminating Medicaid co-pays for prescription drugs and doctor visits, and revoking the asset test and estate repayment provisions for ConnPACE, our prescription drug assistance program for limited income senior citizens; made major strides in protecting our air and water through important environmental legislation; and adopted measures that will significantly reduce overcrowding in our prisons.


As always, I am reporting in this newsletter on issues of particular importance to the two communities that I represent; however, should you have an interest in the issues I mentioned above, I would be happy to send you more information. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact my office.

Sincerely,


Senator John Fonfara




For my latest news, visit www.senatedems.state.ct.us/Fonfara.html



State Senator
John W. Fonfara
CHAIRMAN: Planning & Development
VICE CHAIRMAN: Finance, Revenue & Bonding;
Education; Program Review & Investigations

Representing Hartford and Wethersfield



The Press Room
Senator Fonfara's corner of our Press Room includes recent press releases and his Press Kit.

Legislation
A list of bills introduced by Senator Fonfara during the 2004 session can be found on the General Assembly Web site.

Newsletter
Senator Fonfara's winter 2003 constituent newsletter, Fonfara-DW03.pdf (453k)

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ABOUT SENATOR FONFARA
John Fonfara, a lifelong resident of Hartford, was raised in the

Look & Listen
VIDEO
A video message

From your State Senator

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STATE SENATOR JOHN FONFARA



L-R at El Mercado: myself; Fleet Bank Connecticut Chairman & CEO Chandler Howard; SAMA President Angel Sierra; and Lieutenant Governor Jodi Rell.



Prince Tech will receive \$57 million for a needed renovation.



With State Department of Public Works Commissioner James Fleming admiring the new fence on Capitol Avenue.



Zion Street “perfect sixes” due for rehab.

Continuing to Work for Hartford...

SUPPORT FOR PARK STREET MERCHANTS

Working as part of a team, I am happy to report that we were successful in renewing funding for the Spanish American Merchant Association’s (SAMA) loan pool. SAMA, led by not only Hartford’s but also Connecticut’s most effective merchant director, Julio Mendoza, provides low-interest loans and a wide array of technical assistance to Hartford small businesses. Under SAMA’s leadership, Park Street is continually advancing. With a major streetscape initiative underway, new businesses opening regularly, and now a new \$3 million in state funds plus \$3.7 million from Fleet Bank for the loan pool, Park Street and SAMA are not only the Rising Stars within the Latino community, but for all of Hartford.

RENOVATIONS UNDERWAY AT PRINCE TECH

Hartford’s fourth high school, A.I. Prince Vocational-Technical School, has been overlooked for too many years. The conditions in parts of the school are unacceptable. With over 90% of the enrollment being from the city, and college either not affordable or not the preference for a good number of Hartford kids, Prince Tech must be a meaningful alternative. Working with the school’s leadership, the state Vo-Tech administration, and the Office of Policy and Management, I am proud to report that Prince has been authorized to have work begin on a \$57 million renovation. Although technically a state school, Prince is really our school and we in the Hartford community should support it much more.

INCREASED FUNDING FOR SCHOOLS

Thanks to an improving fiscal situation and our continuing commitment to reducing the burden municipalities have in funding local education, we were able to increase education funding for both Hartford and Wethersfield. With the continued phasing out of the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) cap, Wethersfield will receive an additional \$1 million in state aid for education.

ATTACKING BLIGHT IN OUR NEIGHBORHOODS

Two other initiatives I worked on addressed urban blight. One would allow towns to tax vacant, blighted buildings at a much higher rate than they are currently taxed. This would hopefully give property owners of vacant, blighted property an incentive to fix up or sell their properties. The second effort sought to require absentee landlords to submit to the town clerk either their name and address or that of their agent. Some absentee landlords, particularly limited liability corporations (LLCs), are impossible to locate. Town officials or tenants are often left without any recourse because the property owner is identified as a corporation and by a post office box number. I am working to change this practice and to make irresponsible landlords identifiable and more accountable. Although these two initiatives were not passed into law this year, they will continue to be a priority for me.

FUNDING FOR ZION ST. RENOVATION

With the financial support of the City of Hartford, tax credits from the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority, \$2.1 million in expected funding from the state Department of Economic and Community Development, and a lot of elbow grease, I am pleased to report that sufficient funds should be in place for the renovation of 10 abandoned “perfect sixes” on Zion Street in the Frog Hollow section of Hartford. This area is severely distressed. However, with this project and several others in various stages of completion, we are turning the corner.

NEW FENCE FOR CAPITOL AVE.

For too long, the architectural styling surrounding the parking lot of the State Office Building on Capitol Avenue and Buckingham Street was the ever-attractive Jersey barrier. This motif was a disservice to historic beauty of the entire Capitol area but also to very active residents of the South Downtown (SODO) community. Finally, I can report that the barriers are gone and, in their place, is an attractive, black, wrought iron-style fence.

...and Wethersfield

BIG STEP FORWARD FOR WETHERSFIELD COVE CLEAN-UP

Although the way that bureaucratic systems work don’t encourage this, persistence and determination are often the keys to moving a mountain. In this case, the mountain is the clean-up of Wethersfield Cove. Wethersfield leaders on this issue, in particular Mayor Russell Morin and Cove advocate Leigh Standish, have been persistent and determined in the effort to have all sewage (not just 80% or 90%) diverted from the Cove. With their commitment, and working together with the new leadership at the MDC (Chairman William DiBella), the MDC has agreed, for the first time, to pursue options for diverting all sewage away from the Cove. A major study has been commissioned by the MDC to identify the most cost effective approach. The results are expected this fall. Although the cost associated with this effort needs to be determined, it will be more than the \$10 million we’ve obtained so far; we (the Town of Wethersfield, the Cove advocates, the MDC, and the state DEP) are now all moving in the same direction—to completely clean up the Cove.

SKATE PARK FOR WETHERSFIELD YOUTH

Although final confirmation had not been given when this newsletter was printed, I continue to work for funding for the Wethersfield skateboard project at Mill Woods Park. The young people involved in this effort have done an incredible job of raising awareness and funds. I am hopeful of some good news from our end soon.

Property Tax Credit Restored

Connecticut’s property tax burden is among the worst in the nation, especially for young homeowners and retirees on fixed incomes. It’s a big part of why state and local taxes take twice the bite out of middle incomes than out of millionaires and even the estates of dead millionaires.

Due to the budget crisis we found our state facing in 2003, the 2003-05 state budget reduced the maximum property tax credit that homeowners could claim on their state income tax from \$500 to \$350. I am pleased that, effective with the 2005 tax year, we have been able to restore the maximum property tax credit to \$500. While comprehensive property tax reform remains as our ultimate goal, this tax credit increase will help to ease the financial burden of Hartford and Wethersfield homeowners.